

## **Idaho Public Utilities Commission**

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### **Electric customers can minimize impacts from outages with adequate preparation**

Major electric outages caused by weather in the eastern United States this winter serve as reminders to customers to take steps to be prepared for lengthy outages, which can be especially critical during cold weather. Though not caused by weather, a Dec. 4 outage in eastern Idaho affected customers of a number of eastern Idaho utilities, including Rocky Mountain Power.

“Any number of factors can contribute to outages and customers should be prepared for those rare occasions when they last more than a couple hours,” said Paul Kjellander, president of the Idaho Public Utilities Commission.

In the early morning hours of Feb. 4, the office of the Reliability Coordinator, which is responsible for transmission reliability in the western United States, indicated the possibility of an overload on a critical transformer outside of Rocky Mountain Power’s territory. This condition could have caused a more widespread outage if another problem had developed on the transmission network. To prevent that, Rocky Mountain was ordered at 5 a.m. to begin interrupting service to about 50,000 customers. The controlled outage was expanded to include customers of Idaho Falls Power and Fall River Electric Cooperative as well. The outage lasted as long as 12 hours for some customers. When utilities receive a directive from the Reliability Coordinator, they must comply or face substantial financial penalties.

The requirement to begin a controlled outage came while Rocky Mountain was making repairs at its Goshen Substation near Firth. That repair work is completed but additional improvements are under way. While that work proceeds through the first week in March, a temporary outage is possible if another major part of the transmission network fails.

All three of Idaho’s investor-owned utilities provide tips to customers on how to prepare for outages, what to do during an outage and how to gradually restore service when the outage ends. Here’s a summary of some major points to remember:

- Have an “outage preparation kit” with these items: Matches, flashlights, extra blankets, battery-powered radio, batteries, bottled water, canned and dried foods and ready-to-eat meals that don’t require cooking or cooling, manual can opener, wind-up or battery-powered clock and a phone that doesn’t depend on electricity. Remember, cordless phones will not work without electricity and cellular telephone service may be affected. In an extended outage, alternate means of charging cellular phones is important.

- Avoid opening refrigerator and freezer doors. Keep a large block of ice in the freezer or water bottles or milk jugs with frozen water to maintain cold longer. Know where to keep dry ice to keep food cold as necessary. Freezers should keep food frozen and safe for about two days when kept closed.
- Unplug major appliances and equipment when possible. Appliances that cycle (refrigerators, freezers) or have instant on/standby features (TVs, computers) can be damaged by voltage fluctuations when power is restored. Surge protectors may not provide adequate protection for all equipment. Leave one light or radio on so you know when power is restored. When it is, wait 15 to 30 minutes and begin turning on home appliances and lighting at 10-minute intervals. Alternatively, you can turn off circuit breakers, starting with the smaller breakers first. When restoring power, turn on main switch or breaker and then turn on smaller breakers one at a time. These precautions help circuits from overloading when power is restored.
- Do NOT connect an emergency generator into your home electrical panel. That panel ultimately connects into high-voltage transmission lines and could injure or kill a lineman working to restore electricity. A qualified electrician can install a switch to isolate your home from the utility system. Otherwise, use your generator to run only specific appliances and locate it outside so carbon monoxide fumes don't enter your home.
- If someone in your home is on life support, be sure to have a back-up system and plan of action for an outage.
- Keep your utility's customer service number in a convenient location to receive periodic updates on when power should be restored.

Below is a link to outage information and tips from Idaho's major investor-owned electric utilities.

**Idaho Power:**

<https://www.idahopower.com/ServiceBilling/Outages/outagetips.cfm>

**Rocky Mountain Power:**

<https://www.rockymountainpower.net/ed/po/os.html>

**Avista Utilities:**

[www.avistautilities.com/safety/outages/Pages/prepare.aspx](http://www.avistautilities.com/safety/outages/Pages/prepare.aspx).